



## CHARACTERISTICS OF A GREAT PREACHER

by Joel James

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### 1. Faithful:

Paul the apostle:

*The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim 2:2)*

### 2. Focused:

One side of pastoral ministry:

*A human being should be able to change a [nappy], plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects. (attributed to Robert Heinlein)*

Because ministry is like that, you need *focus*:

G. Campbell Morgan:

*The supreme work of the Christian minister is the work of preaching. This is a day in which one of our great perils is that of doing a thousand little things to the neglect of the one thing, which is preaching. (quoted in Michael Fabarez, *Preaching That Changes Lives*, 84)*

Ligon Duncan:

*Today's minister, by definition, is something of a jack-of-all-trades. He is often viewed as the chief administrative officer, the chief executive officer, the staff hand-holder, the chief visitor, the head preacher/teacher/counsellor, the public relations liaison, the key denominational representative of the local congregation and more. It is flatly impossible to do a good job at all of this. When one tries to do so, study usually gets squeezed out by the tyranny of the urgent. So, you are going to have to plan carefully when to study and then how to protect that time. ("Keep Studying," *Dear Timothy*, Ascol ed., 209)*

J. Oswald Sanders:

*If his ambition is to excel, there must be selection and rejection, then concentration on the things of paramount importance. (Spiritual Leadership, 115)*

### 3. **Hard-working:**

Jay Adams:

*I am convinced that the basic reason for poor preaching is the failure to spend adequate time and energy in preparation. Many preachers—perhaps most—simply don't work long enough on their sermons. (Quoted in Rediscovering Expository Preaching, 210)*

Borgman:

*Laziness in sermon preparation will erode people's respect and confidence in the man of God. The fruit of his labour ought to reveal the sweat of his labour, and the astute will know that the sermon didn't appear overnight .... But they will also know when they are getting scraps and leftovers. They will resent it; and they should. The difference between pulpit excellence and mediocrity is hard work over the long haul. (My Heart for Thy Cause, 98)*

### 4. **Self-disciplined:**

*Procrastination and vacillation are fatal to leadership [and to sermon preparation!]. (J. Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, 77)*

MacArthur:

*I never study to make a sermon. I study to understand the text. I use a system I call "planned neglect" I plan to neglect everything else until my studying is done. (Rediscovering Expository Preaching, 335)*

### 5. **Studious:**

Ligon Duncan:

*Very frankly, ... most Protestant pastors don't read or study very much these days, and most churches don't encourage them to do so .... There is a strong dose of anti-intellectualism in our circles and it doesn't encourage a man to do the hard work of developing the mind and expanding his knowledge.*

*But precisely because our people are bathed in trivial information in this day and age, they need a shepherd with real knowledge, much discernment and a nose for truth. ("Keep Studying," in Dear Timothy, Ascol ed., 196)*

Sanders:

*In an age in which people have more leisure than ever before in the history of the world, many claim that they have no time to read. That excuse is never valid with a spiritual leader. (Spiritual Leadership, 124)*

The benefits of reading for a preacher (Sanders, 126-127)

- spiritual quickening
- mental stimulation
- cultivation of style in your preaching
- acquiring information
- to have fellowship with great minds

*Master a few books rather than ... read indiscriminately. (Sanders, 128)*

Spurgeon:

*Master those books you have. Read them thoroughly. Bathe in them until they saturate you. Read and re-read them, masticate them, and digest them. Let them go into your very self .... A student will find that his mental constitution is more affected by one book thoroughly mastered than by twenty books which he has merely skimmed ... (Lectures, 177)*

## 6. Optimistic:

*A pessimist never makes an inspiring leader. (Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, 34)*

*Success is moving from failure to failure without becoming discouraged. (attributed to Winston Churchill)*

## 7. Prayerful:

*A pastor who feels competent in himself to produce eternal fruit—which is the only kind that matters—knows neither God nor himself. A pastor who does not know the rhythm of desperation and deliverance must have his sights only on what man can achieve. (John Piper, Brothers We Are Not Professionals, 54)*

*Apart from Me you can do nothing. (Jesus, John 15:5)*

*Spiritual ends can be achieved only by spiritual men who employ spiritual methods. (Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, 42)*

## 8. Cross-centred:

*A lot has changed since I first trusted in Christ, but a lot has stayed the same. I'm grateful to say that what matters the most has remained the same. The cross is still at the center. (CJ Mahaney, *The Cross-centered Life*, 74, emphasis original)*

#### 9. Humility:

*Sinfully and culturally defined, pursuing greatness looks like this: Individuals motivated by self-interest, self-indulgence, and a false sense of self-sufficiency pursue selfish ambition for the purpose of self-glorification. (CJ Mahaney, *Humility*, 44)*

*Contrary to popular and false belief, it's not "those who help themselves" whom God helps; it's those who humble themselves. (*Humility*, 21, emphasis original)*

#### 10. Integrity:

*One proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon ... (Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 63)*

#### 11. Resilience:

*Often the crowd does not recognize a leader until he has gone, and then they build a monument [to] him with the stones they threw at him in life. (Cowman, quoted in Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 149)*

#### 12. Realistic:

*The perfectionist usually sets goals quite beyond his ability to attain and then entertains a false sense of guilt because of failure to achieve. (Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 47)*

#### 13. Skilful:

MacArthur:

*What is it that equips a man to be qualified for preaching responsibility? Certainly I could argue for the following elements: reverence for God, respect for the dignity of pastoral duty, good sense, sound judgement, clear and deep thinking, love of reading, commitment to diligent study, and meditation. A good memory, graceful command of words, knowledge of the thinking of society—all these traits are also essential ....*

*But above all, over all, and through all ... he must be skilled in the word. This is the preacher's only weapon... (Rediscovering Expository Preaching, xiv)*

Conclusion:

My prayer is that God has used this course as a jockey's whip, urging you into a gallop when it comes to studying and preaching God's word.

My hope is that a historian writing about your ministry could say what E. C. Dargan said about preaching in the 1800's:

*The contents of preaching remained substantially the same—the great doctrines and morals of the Christian faith as presented in the Scriptures. But the interpretation of the Bible was much improved .... There was a more general and manifest desire among the preachers to get and apply the exact meaning of the Word of God .... Individual preachers made more effort to find for themselves the meaning of Scripture ... (Dargan, A History of Preaching, 2:354)*

Closing thought:

Find Us Faithful  
John Mohr

*We're pilgrims on the journey of the narrow road  
and those who've gone before us line the way,  
cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary,  
their lives a stirring testament to God's sustaining grace.*

*Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses  
let us run the race not only for the prize,  
but as those who've gone before us,  
let us leave to those behind us  
the heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives.*

*Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful.  
May the fire of our devotion light their way.  
May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe,  
and the lives we live inspire them to obey.*

*Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful.*